

64

66t

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

WILLIAM RILEY HALSTEAD

A
A



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

000 821
644
2



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Tarren L. Both
Sept 7, 1919
CONFERENCE
At
Greeley

BY THIS AUTHOR

A COSMIC VIEW OF RELIGION

Crown 8vo. Net, \$1.50

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

A MONOGRAPH IN FOLK PHILOSOPHY

WILLIAM RILEY HALSTEAD



THE ABINGDON PRESS

NEW YORK

CINCINNATI

Copyright, 1919, by
WILLIAM RILEY HALSTEAD



Hb
64
H166C

CONTENTS

PAGE

I. APPROPRIATION	7
II. PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE WAGE	25
III. THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A LIVING.....	34
IV. THE COMMUNITY AND THE CLASSES	45
V. THE ECONOMIC SIDE OF SOCIALISM	69
VI. THE SOIL	92

1458991

I

APPROPRIATION

So far as my neighbors are concerned, I have a property right to the honey-bees in my yard. How it came to pass that I have the feeling of ownership in them is a long, long story. My neighbors like honey as well as I do, but they understand the situation, and I am not disturbed. The civil law settles for us this and all kindred questions of social justice. But I take this honey whenever I feel like it. If an impulse should take my bees to colonize elsewhere, I could not help myself. If they could understand why I keep them, they ought to leave me, because I am a robber. They have certain fine correspondences with truth which I do not have, and which I appropriate. It

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

takes one bee about one hundred trips, of, say, two miles each, to fill with honey one cell one inch long. It takes two hundred of these cells, well filled, to put in good shape my buttered cakes for breakfast. I gulp down at one meal the product of forty thousand miles of journeyings among the flowers. For my one breakfast many bees have worn out their wings, and have ceased at once to work and live. I am the extravagant yokefellow of that ancient epicure king who had his meat service made of the tongues of tropical song birds.

I am a cold-blooded robber. The wild bear in the woods likes honey and takes it. I take it for the same reason. The bees resent my intrusions, but I blow smoke in their eyes and take it. I have no better reason for what I do than my simian ancestors. My act is a flat, unmitigated appropriation—and it is one of nature's tragedies. I leave enough honey in the hive for the colony to winter through. The bear would do the

APPROPRIATION

same thing if he had as much sense as I have. He eats all the honey and the bees also. I do not like the taste of a bee, and I leave it some of the golden nectar, because I expect to rob that hive another time. The bear does not know whether he will or not. He has no capacity to consider that proposition. I see to it that the bees get on. I make for them a better housing. I pad the stand about in wintertime. They feast on the bloom of my tulip trees. I sow buckwheat for their forage. I furnish artificial food if I see that I have cut the slices too deep. But it is not in me to make restitution or reparation.

The bee family is somewhat advantaged by the rapacity of the robber. They are an improved breed. They have a better time. They have fewer enemies because they have this big one. The bees prosper because the robber has learned the art of continuous appropriation. I am the superman. I have ac-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

tually accomplished what Germany has started out to do for the other peoples of this planet. And if any power on earth ever comes to where it can make use of *my* toil and energy *for my own good*, I will begin to suspect that the logic of appropriation—pushed to such limits—measures the sum of all villainies. And why? Between myself and my bees exists the biological justification which I have stated. Between myself and my fellow men the justification must be moral.

For thirty years my driving mare Maude has been my most faithful servant. I have been her sole owner from the foaling time. I have bitted her and harnessed her at my will. I have worked her often to the limit. When she has become jaded, I have given her a brief rest, and then urged her on again. When she has run to the back of the pasture to escape the harness, I have punished her. She now pudges about the farm not worth her salt. But she

APPROPRIATION

has paid for her keep a hundred times over, and I have promised her provender and a stall so long as we both shall live. In the last ten years we have become companionable. She tells me whether she wants ground feed, or sheaf oats, or sweet corn stover. When I have been away for a few days and come around the corner of the lot, she comes across to greet me. She has fared better under my ownership than if she had been turned into the wilds when a colt. But in all the years of her usefulness, even that mild altruism never entered my head. I have appropriated her splendid qualities and have worn her out.

Now, reader, put on your thinker a minute, and let us see where this principle of appropriation leads when it comes to be applied to the human life.

With all living things nutrition is a necessity. The supply of nutrition is life's counterpart. Hungry worms and

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

bugs and birds and animals and men are alike the subjects of the one insistent impulse to appropriate whatever may supply a need. The law of it is universal. The conflicts of life are about the supply of an insatiate need. The need is continuous—the supply must be also, and adequate, if life persists. If the supply is abundant, there is wholesale appropriation, and a general fattening. Among the lower life forms one form often feeds on another; and where the need crowds the supply, there is conflict over possession, and the devil takes the hindmost. Mr. Darwin made splendid use of the principle of conflict in his explanation of life's survivals. Some factors in the natural world which he did not fully consider modify, to a degree, his conclusions, but his interpretation stands. Survival is not the end of life. The final end of all life is extinction, and its meaning, therefore, must be an overplay.

Whether or not it be a remaining

APPROPRIATION

animal trait, the particular inclination to appropriate whatever the eye sees, the appetite craves, and the hands can reach, is deep laid in human nature. Place two babies in reach of each other, and there is immediate difficulty. One appropriates a bib, and the other a fist, and tries to swallow it. Years ago I picked up from the pavement a pocket-book and opened the clasp and saw it bulging with money. I immediately looked all about to see if anyone saw me pick it up. Why did I do that? It was a remaining baby trait not yet grilled out. I submit that a man is never as bad as his worst—and he is never as good as he thinks he is. I met a woman in twenty minutes, greatly flustered, to whom I handed the purse, and she said to me, "Sir, you are an honest man." I thanked her, but I did not tell her all.

The habit of the primitive man is to appropriate whatever he wants and can get from the wilds. Abraham

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

staked off the best pieces of pasture lands he could find, and he made things unpleasant for all intruders. But it is not a long journey from the patriarch's time to where that kind of appropriation becomes a crime fit to be punished. Man's associative life comes in to modify the terms of all raw appropriation. People do not live long in any favored region until the spontaneous products of the earth are not equal to human needs. Population crowds subsistence, under the law of Malthus, wherever nature is unaided. The soil, the sky, and the sea become only the potential sources of human sustenance, and other progressive needs. Possession begins to have a social significance at the point where possession is the result of labor bestowed. The right of possession gets itself clear cut about the edges at the point where labor makes the soil produce what it would not do unaided, or where human ingenuity shapes a mechanism. These new factors

APPROPRIATION

bring about a new set of understandings to modify the whole question of appropriation. I may not, therefore, go out among my neighbors and appropriate everything in sight. Possession there, in an orderly society, implies the increment of earning. The "mine" and the "thine" appears under customs and rules of fairness and equity. The spot where a man digs for his own lentils begins to be made socially secure to him. Until that is so, he has no heart to dig, because he has no show for his life. If any one stronger than he is may appropriate his lentils, the motives for toil are overthrown, both with the weak and the strong. It is the same with a man's tools, his coat, his domicile. The right of possession inheres in what a man makes or earns. The conception of private property, therefore, becomes the economic base of material prosperity. The Magna Charta of the naked toiler's life is the secured right to what he makes or earns. It gives him

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

the impetus to accumulate and conserve. One of the greatest achievements of civil liberty is the vast diffusion of property values in the modern world. It is the explanation of why the world grows rich beyond the El Dorado dreams. The law of property was seldom administered in equity among ancient peoples. I do not call to mind an instance of wealth generally diffused in the world's earlier time. The motive was absent in protected right. An ancient rich man, if he had not friends at court, was always a plump partridge for the hawks. The average toiler was always stripped to the bone. The old animal law and impulse was in vogue, and myriad excuses were invented for its exercise. The secured right under dependable law to one's honest earnings is not an old social guarantee. It runs not much further back than the English burghers and King John. The "mine" and the "thine" has always been known because it is an inherency, but

APPROPRIATION

the recognition and civil assertion of it as an efficient economic factor in the world's life is not an inheritance, but one of the conquests of personal liberty.

The obligation to toil carries with it the right to its product. No social dreamer has ever been able to introduce a practical substitute for the principle of private property. No other motive to industry and saving has ever been so strong to call out the economic best of the personal life. It is the life of industrialism. Under its action the physical aspect of the earth is being refashioned and transformed. If a man makes an ax handle, and has come honestly by the timber, he has become a wealthy man by so much as that tool is worth more than the green stick in the tree. He has put on it an added value, and that value is his. Any proposition to the contrary is socialistic nonsense.

What is wealth? Anything of value.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

What is property? Wealth related to its owner. What is capital? Wealth used in the production of other wealth. The sin of capital does not exist. Sin is always personal. The curse of capital is in its misuse. The curse of chemistry is that it is now killing its millions. The curse of the sunshine is its conflagrations. The law of the chemistries and of the sunshine obeyed has no betrayals. It is the human which plays havoc with these things.

But property must be understood as having an associative meaning. It is socially related because the owner cannot escape his social obligations. The owner of an ax handle sets it in the eye of an ax, then he splits kindling to start furnace fires, and scores of little babies are kept snug and warm. An ax handle contributes to the cause of civilization.

Any refusal to obey this law of relatedness, any reversal of it, any attempted exclusiveness, any tearing down of barns to build larger, any

APPROPRIATION

wholesale piggishness, any big-dog taking the whole bone to hide what he cannot eat, is humanly destructive. The self-centered property holder is a social bandit. Property, if it conserves itself, must make its contribution to society. Human beings do not get along together at all unless they have advantages and amenities in common. Diogenes in his tub, asking only that others keep out of his sunshine, has in it the sum of all absurdities. His kind are social pariahs and blood-suckers. We are to live by what we earn, but we are to live together. In civilized society, each holder of any property is advantaged more by what his fellows have than by what he has himself. As soon as we are born we are the recipients of advantage from that biological complex which we call society, and the stream of it takes care of itself to come our way. Take any rich man in America and put him stark naked in the heart of Africa—then furnish him with a few yards of ten-cent

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

red muslin to clothe himself withal, and he will soon see what civilized society means. Under advanced living conditions the largest blessings of life are not derived from the self-energy, but from the fact that those about us are toilers and producers of value. My farm has value not so much because I make it produce as because my neighbors have farms just as good and productive.

The right of appropriation and use, therefore, which would be absolute in any solitary state, is modified by the obligation to contribute to that which secures the right in law and custom, and that which multiplies the values of all personal holding a hundredfold. Man's civil institutions have never yet adequately pressed the importance of that feature of the property life of the world on the masses. The free rein to self-getting has never been drawn to the full protection of community interests. The right to earn and get is not to be

APPROPRIATION

disputed, but the obligation which comes with it is to be demanded.

New and unprecedented conditions have come about among Western peoples. The profits of production naturally tend to collect in currents. A few have been shrewd to manipulate these currents and to extract tribute by contributing to the movement. The result has been individual accumulation in a vast way. Quite a number of those who have become famous as wealthy men appear to be doing their level best to socialize their wealth, but the fact remains that the power which their personal holdings puts into their hands becomes a menace. Wealth in such vast personal accumulation does not relate itself normally to society as small property values do. Those who administer such large accumulations are able to determine other interests than their own. They have power to put competition out of action. They have power to shut out of work many thousands of honest and

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

dependent workmen. They have power to shut the open door of business. They have the power of commercial paralysis. Society is interested in a magnitude. It has grown to where it must be put under bond to the public, which now carries a risk, until that bond is signed and sealed.

This principle of associative obligation applies with equal force to bodies of workmen where they constitute a group, and have come to exercise their right to concert of action concerning wages and the other conditions of labor. The workmen who toil and the capital investment which makes employment possible, are both dependent on the common community life to which they belong. Before one has a strike, or the other a lockout, the community ought to be able to express itself as the party of the larger interest. The contention that a thousand men may do with impunity whatever one man may do is utterly untenable. Whenever

APPROPRIATION

bodies of men act in concert they become amenable to the community in the degree that they are able to make use of its collective social values. An increase of power means an increase of responsibility. There ought not to exist anywhere an investment of power able to throw the business affairs of a community into confusion, and for the plain reason that the whole of a thing must be made first over any of its parts. The community welfare is of so much greater value than that of any individual that a few extra dollars to be earned, or a larger profit secured, must not weigh successfully against it. And a clash of interest in the long run is not possible. A healthy body means healthy organs—healthy cells.

Identity of interest is through running. One of the defects of much industrial thinking is that it is not broadened by a knowledge which includes the social vision. It rises up to challenge the centers of control. It is a new kind

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

of social brigandage. It refused to consider the right of the equal opportunity, and nobody left out. The few must not fatten to the detriment of the many. It is a poor kind of mind which does not see that. Democracy in the world in its action is a lubberly thing. It will not come to its own until it articulates with the last man, and puts an end to special privilege, and monopoly, and all kinds of exploiting. The people have set themselves to rule, but they have not yet come into their kingdom. When they do, neither capital nor labor, even under a just contention, will be allowed to appropriate that to which it has no right—the general economic welfare and happiness of the whole community.

II

PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE WAGE

CERTAIN economists of brilliant rhetoric denounce capital in toto. "Capitalism" is the opprobrious term. Their contention is that capital pitted against the workman is the bane of civilization. Labor ought to own what it produces. Capital ought to be abolished—so ought the capitalistic class; and for the reason, it is said, that the product of labor turned back into industrial enterprise to become an earning factor takes command of the laborer by making him a competing force with that which he produces. The fallacy of that position is clearly seen. Does the maker of an ax handle or a hammer come into competition with his tool when he uses it?

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

There is no other principle involved in that kind of use of any value. The toiler struggles not against that which he produces. His controversy is often with the manager of capital, who knows and uses his power to overbear and oppress. There can be no objection to the proposition that a man ought to own what he makes. But a civilized man does not wish to own all that he makes. One man cannot make everything, and every man ought not to make the same thing. A man often wishes to exchange what he makes for that which another makes. But exchange in kind is not always feasible. So economic society has invented certain equivalents of value to expedite exchange. Production is a necessity. Exchange is a necessity. And the use of that which is exchanged wears it out directly, and that makes way for new production; and whether or not that circle is vicious depends on the way we go about it.

Two men make a wagon. When it is

PROPERTY AND WAGE

finished, by common consent, each man owns one half. But a wagon is not often conveniently owned in partnership. One man gives the other an equivalent for his half and owns all the wagon. The man who gets the equivalent gives it to a third man to help him build another wagon. So the endless chain starts. And all the elements of both production and exchange are now in motion. The produce of labor is being turned back to increase the number of laborers. Business is advantaged by making a part of the product of labor an earning factor. Wagon makers are given a chance to own something besides wagons, when other men are busy making other things.

Now, that is not an invented economic machine. It is the normal economic evolution of human industry. It is the application of plain common sense to an industrial situation. Nobody harmed. Nobody disadvantaged. But as business in this way grows, and each

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

separate pursuit of man begins to take on its own differential, it becomes the custom to take an equivalent for labor, rather than the product itself. Labor becomes standardized. After a time it is called the wage. The wage is supposed to be the equivalence divided into tidbits. It is a great convenience. The wage system will stand. The majority of men wish to work without the tax of administration. Many have a fine capacity for skilled work without capacity for the executive efficiencies so necessary to successful business. The profits of business under the wage plan are seen directly to have an earning power. This power utilized increases profits, and the door of opportunity is opened for other laborers, and nobody is disadvantaged. Where is the bugbear—where the “blood and dirt”? There is nothing invalid about it under the law of thrift, and none under the law of mutual justice. Man has not learned a better economic way. The

PROPERTY AND WAGE

plan of it has become an industrial axiom. It is questioned only by those who put themselves under a strain to find out some new thing.

But has the plan of it always worked smoothly? No. Grit in the cogs? Yes. Because of the way of it? No. It was a sad day when somebody learned that a trick could be played with capital. Under the trick of it the millions have suffered. They rightly put themselves against the trick—or rather the trickster—and not against that which has no sensible substitute. It is a dull mind which cannot distinguish between a vital industrial factor and its misuse. If we start out to abolish everything which has the possibility of a trick in it, we may prepare to move off the planet. We shall abolish dynamite and lucifer matches. We shall abolish the rivers and the mountains. We shall abolish the sunshine and all zero weather.

Put a hook in the nose of the trickster, and stop there. Let the industrial

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

method stand. It has stood the test of the ages. The cooperation of the laborer with his product is simply the partnership of the man with his hammer. A man ought not to have a quarrel with his hammer. It is true that the full equivalent in the wage is not always received. That is the fault of the rascal on the other side of the fence. The just way of it implies an equivalent, and men everywhere cling to it because they are convinced of its convenience and mutual fairness. Our methods of production and exchange will not have any radical shift, because they are the results of long experience, and they are natural, and the validity of contract under them must also stand. And since that is so, human society has no way of preventing any of us from getting the worst of a contract occasionally. When we get what we bargain for, it is only one of the challenges of life to take out in experience what we did not get in the bargain.

PROPERTY AND WAGE

If a contract is open and without deceit, it is not robbery. We shall always have instances of less than the just wage. And we shall have instances of more than a just wage. And when the whole issue is driven into that particular corner, the problem is simplified and we may deal with it without turning the world topsy-turvy.

The wage cannot be stratified because business enterprises are unequal. There is no remedy for the unequal wage, as there is none for the unequal ownership of property. In much of the world's work a large wage cannot be paid because the work done will not yield it. Human society has no remedy for that situation. The minimum wage is a social beneficence, but it could be placed at a point where much of the world's work would go undone. There can be no social arrangement made to relieve incapacity and lack of wit from the distress of itself. To the indigent and helpless belong the humanities, which

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

must be administered to them aside from the trade equities. A dolt will eat as many biscuits for breakfast as Shakespeare, but the two can never be identically conditioned. There ought not to be equality of living between a life of temperance and probity and one of libertinism and crime. Distress should not be put on the strong in order to give the worthless a quiet time. Sponges and defectives should not have the first dip in the dish. There is a maudlin sympathy which would put all the neurotics in cotton batting. Society can never go into the business of nursing defectives with useless refinements. Neither can it build a criminal code on the theory that all criminals are simply diseased, and need a doctor more than the consequences in punitive law. The soft theory contradicts the plain facts of life. No one has any right to the social attention which will keep his tenderness from graving the rocks anywhere. It is not good for any man to

PROPERTY AND WAGE

get it into his head that the ravens are obliged to feed him. The cry of the honest poor must always be heard, and the call of justice must be a thunder note, but the economic society which undertakes to coddle all comers will finally eliminate the fit.

III

THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A LIVING

THE average workman to-day is not making any demand to have built for himself a fool's paradise. He is intensely interested in the question of a social opportunity to get on in the world. The hazard of no work, for the bread winner, is now a nightmare in the doorway of millions of homes. There are millions of straight toilers who have put no tarnish on any dollar they have ever earned: they have lived the upright life, they have not lacked energy, they have provident habits, they have had the average capacity for shifting—and they have often suffered the keen distress of unemployment. At times millions want work and cannot get it.

OPPORTUNITY

They have not been able to protect themselves from the new directions and the reversals in business. They are not applicants for charity. They are not township wards. They refuse the proffered aid which costs them their self-respect. They are always willing to give honest work for honest money. But they have heard the wolf bark at the door.

The question is this—must it be that the advance of civilization increases the stress and tension of the honest wage-earner's life? The issue is intricate and involved. But only the thinker who is a coward to-day runs away from it. Can the civil administration guarantee to competent and worthy workmen an opportunity to work for a living?

An occasional man out of a job may be considered sporadic, and negligible, so far as society is concerned. Ten thousand men in a single city out of work presents a situation which measures to the magnitude of a social ad-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

versity. But if the community steps in to provide work for these ten thousand, what has come to pass? Are we not then in the edges of a paternalism which will unnerve the citizenship directly? Must there be a social somewhat to catch every workman when he falls—and will not the fact of it put him in leading strings? Is it good for him to be relieved from the necessity of having his wits about him? Need he then look ahead for any landslide? Will not such a provision be the downfall of the industrial manhood? Will it not defeat the self-origination? Will it not make the human intellect sterile? Is not the perpetual challenge of the breadline good for a man?

Now, the logic of that kind of questioning—sound as much of it is—means that ten thousand men at a time out of work must simply be left to themselves. Ask them to trust God and keep the law? What law? What law is more imperious than hunger? To find a

OPPORTUNITY

social response to that situation is simply a question of adroitness. A long time ago DeTocqueville became alarmed at the swift growth of democracy. He said we needed a new political science, that we had run clear out of any historic precedent to guide us. Men have now come together in such masses under the demand of great enterprises that they have gotten in each other's way. There would be a business or a job for each man, and a man for each job, if a hungry man could wait for the mill of the gods to grind him a grist. The economic gestation is too slow for the human stomach. The rhythm of one is at most a few measured hours; the rhythm of the other is often ten years. The confusion is cosmic.

Things are not all well with this world because the very splendor of it has overtaxed the human wit. While the earth is being transformed much confusion takes place in the movement of it. While many get on, too many

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

people get run over. Blakelock the artist, with a wife and nine children, discovered that bread and shelter and a fire cost more than his soul spread out on canvas would bring in the market—and it sent him mad. After twenty years in the asylum he was released, and was taken to see his pictures, some of which had brought twenty thousand dollars.

On Blackwell's Island, New York city, at this time, two thousand homeless, despairing old women are housed. They die there, one by one, and their bodies are taken to the potter's field. When these women were young they toiled and served—and sinned, it may be—but they are here in a corral, to be pitched out at a great city's gehenna gate. Probably much more than this number of the refuse of womankind in the great city lies hidden in oblivion. The damnation of it is not in the death of them, but at the point where civilization slays the human spirit. We have

OPPORTUNITY.

come to a place in the world's advancing life where the common man always runs the narrow risk of being swallowed up. Our fine theories about tactfulness and shift and adaptability amount to nothing. The toiler goes to the limit of his powers, and he will get on if his job lasts. His job to him is the greatest thing this side of heaven. The slim tenure of it which hangs over him like a shadow has come to be more than an incident of progress. It is the dispiriting of the million. If civilization becomes the friend only of the mentally and physically strong, it has become a brute survival. There is no actual progress in it until it has found the middle way where, if some travel in luxury, all may travel in comfort, if they meet life's normal demands. It is not worth while to try to fasten responsibility with any wholesale accusation. The ignoramus only knows who did it. The student of affairs finds in it a perplexing and intricate problem. He

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

sees the human life exploited in a cumulative rush. He sees the joy of life go out of the faces of the multitudes as they are beaten back in their efforts to get on. People of the same race blood, readers of the same books, patrons of the same schools, dwellers in the same neighborhood, lovers of the same art and music, believers in the same faith, undercut and slaughter with a ruthless hand; they engage in a veritable bull fight over the world's stuff. The economic strife makes relentless enemies. The situation is serious when eighty per cent of those who struggle must face disappointed desire. So many men now pass the measured hours without alacrity or joy. They collect in groups and are silent and sullen. And they accent a situation where their souls are being tried. It is dehumanizing. It is a tragedy of the false and the unreal.

As the French scholar thought, the rush of business has outgrown the

OPPORTUNITY

science of it. Economic law has not kept pace with personal and social needs. We have smitten the earth and it has brought forth its responses, and we have been careless about the co-ordinations of justice among those who are to divide the spoil. We have not taken an invoice to find out the debits and credits of anything but dollars and cents. We are astonished and alarmed to find that civilization has produced a Moloch with red-hot arms. Material conditions are advanced and the uncertainties of getting on have increased. The tension of the situation is through running. The very soul of the community will snap directly. But any wholesale recrimination and abuse about it is superficial and petulant. It is a very great weakness to translate the distress of it into a spleen against some imagined enemy. Capitalists are only ordinary sinners. It is not tenable to charge this particular feature of the problem up to the millionaires. If they

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

were all set in a row and shot, and their property confiscated and divided equally between one hundred millions of people, there would only be a snip for each one—not near enough to keep us alive until the country could be restored from the consequences of the dastardly act. Is it the fault of capital that the country regions are being depleted and the cities overcrowded, and food products reaching an alarming price? Anybody knows that food shortage means not enough people digging in the soil. The remedy for that could be applied almost instantly. But it will not be because city people yet prefer the disease to the remedy. If gangrene sets in, there will be a return to the lauded glories of farm life.

We have come to the place where city workmen especially cannot do for themselves what they once did, under the simpler and less complex conditions of sparse population. The right of equal opportunity for all alike must be

OPPORTUNITY

made to include now the actual opportunity to get on under civilized conditions. The civil administration must deal with the actual situation of the stranded mass. When overproduction throws men out, or the shifts of demand, or a new invention makes useless a lot of skilled labor, the personal shiftiness is not always equal to the necessities of the case. To men thrown under by industrial change the community owes the right of an escape from the distress of it. It need not be a moiety doled out. It need not be the opportunity for a carefree sail down life's stream. It must be a mitigation of the black asperities brought on by no fault of the worker. It need only be a provision against crisis times. It must be an opportunity measured out in justice. It is only the intent here to discuss a principle. The application of it is a question of detail in practical sociology. The civil community is always engaged in socializing large units of wealth in

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

roadways, and schools, and other buildings, and parks and playgrounds, and in all kinds of public utilities. These could be undertaken on a vaster scale at a minimum wage, and those who make use of the opportunity of the earning could justly have the credit of a contribution to the public weal. There might also be a social supervision of the distribution of labor, both in degree and in kind. A shift of workmen from place to place is feasible. The expense of the transfer could be made to relieve congestion and to supply shortage. Whatever is required to bring it to pass, let this great country lay at the door of every man the actual opportunity for bread and a fire and civilized conditions.

IV

THE COMMUNITY AND THE CLASSES

ROBINSON CRUSOE had a whole island to himself. Nobody was near to invade his rights. There was no chance for him to interfere with others. He was in a distressful state of unlimited freedom. He was a shifty slave to unrelated living. But he got away at the first opportunity. The struggles we have with our human surroundings are never so great as would be our inconveniences and vexations if we were naked-handed and obliged to make our way with the very best the raw values of nature could afford.

The validity of the yielded will to the social rule lies in the fact that in such a transaction we make a good ex-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

change. We compound our duty, our service, our obedience. We get in return an enrichment of rights and advantages. By so much are the personal will and the social will complemental. This is why any life invested in community values is a rich life. With every soldier in France to die is gain. Any act of service to the public has in it the full measure of personal benefit—if not to the one who gives it, then to others. Self-forgetfulness for the common weal is everywhere esteemed of great merit.

When it is so evident that we cannot live anywhere without society, it is madness to bring damage to it by any act of our own. Reason ought to impel human action with at least as much certainty of direction as instinct does among animals and insects. The gregarious and company-loving animals are always the more prosperous. A honeybee among the flowers seldom stings when it can escape. When the hive is attacked it reaches the stinging

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

point instantly, and that too when to use the sting is always death to itself. The colony life is the higher life there because it is absolutely essential to the existence of each insect.

We cannot act or live normally except as we are related to the component community units. The insular life for brief moments may be counted a luxury. There is a kind of poetry in solitude unless we pursue it too intently. Occasionally we enjoy the privilege of being let alone. These luxuries are little holidays which we take, away from the surfeit and noise of even good company. The rule is, the more we mix and have to do with our fellows the more we live. Associative interests are not antagonistic to the individual when rightly balanced. Biologically the unities are at the bottom. All the deeper interests of the human race are the same interests. Wherever the plain old moralities are set to work, obligations and rights are set over against

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

each other to work for the peace of society, which translates itself always into the welfare of the individual. When it is remembered that the higher advantages of civilized living, as well as many of the necessities of life, are actual social contributions, private-mindedness will appear plainly to be shortsightedness. When those of lawful age take the oath of allegiance to the community rule of living, it ought to be like a stake driven down to stay. The law to which sworn fealty is given is supposed to embody the elements of political justice long since tried out by experience. This law, the accretion of generations, becomes the distilled political logic of history, and is not to be set aside by any individual judgment whatever. Those who do not like the political rule under which they live ought not to have sworn in under it. On this planet yet there is opportunity for various choices, but the obligation of fealty follows the choice. Against the individual the law

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

of the land stands at all times. That little affected overplay of the superiority of the personal conscience over the law of the land is often no more than a mixture of self-conceit and self-will.

That which is occasionally granted as a deference to conscience, if granted to all, would disintegrate the social bond itself. The law may not be perfection, but its integrities are one with the continuance of the social order. There cannot be just scruples against the fair and open covenant. The conscience which breaks with the covenant it takes is not likely to be one hundred per cent in any special direction. It is better to suffer, or even to die under the civil rule than to dispute its authority, because the authority broken means no rule for anybody. An individual conscience is hardly authorized to bring about a remediless social confusion. The law may not measure out to men at all times an infallible justice, but the

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

reverse of it is absolute individualism, which is the defeat of all civil coordinations whatever. The judicial and executive administration under the law as it exists must always stand. Respect for and obedience to the law is the highest duty of citizenship.

This principle applies with equal force to classes or bodies of citizens. Numbers do not count except as they constitute a majority expressed under the modes which the community has provided for itself. Class resistance to the common law is as disloyal as personal resistance, and much more mischievous. Those who in concert make up a class obstruction have each previously taken the community oath, and now by concert of understanding they buttress one another against a social principle, the validity of which is not weakened by numbers. In the clash of industrial competitions this primary social essential tends to get out of view. Perfectly honest toilers often get

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

grooved—immersed—submerged, by the continuous years of hard working conditions. Their beloved country appears not to have come to their relief, and they begin to think of it as not a desperately sacred thing. Whatever the issue, community loyalty must not be subordinated to class loyalty. Any appeal to class consciousness is of that nature. The tendency has in it a peril. The sun gets to rising and setting over one's home hill. The group spirit comes to be first over the common patriotism, and it takes the place of the voice which every citizen has pledged to obey. It is true that the members of a group may become the victims of an injustice; and it is also true that they may go about the redress of it in the wrong way. The method of the redress may be as reprehensible as the injustice itself. If society endures, where its law is not obeyed willingly, it must assume the power of coercion in the enforcement of that law. There is no alternative.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

The sovereignty of the common law is everything.

Bodies of men may lawfully act together, and may make for themselves certain centers of economic endeavor, but they must conform to the strictures which society in general places over them, and for the very good reason that the general welfare is of greater significance than any particular welfare, or any group welfare, even if it were possible in a just society for the two to come into conflict.

Large corporate investments have often shown an intent to get the largest possible profit, in disregard of the humanistic appeals. Technically the law may be obeyed. Business is business. A corporation is impersonal. The pound of flesh may be taken and the pious incorporators may stay out from under. Corporate capital in recent years feels the revolt of public opinion against the vicious fallacy that corporate wealth may be justly cut away

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

from those who manage it. Public opinion begins to demand that wealth used in the industries shall relate itself personally. Managers of large concerns are coming to see that if their business prospers, they must make terms with public sentiment. Capital is about to be stopped from becoming an Achilles heel. There is a social investment in any corporation because it cannot exist without society. Public opinion also puts its ban on the unsocial features of working organizations. Where special interests become careless of general interests, where the will of the few comes to cross purposes with the rights of the many, the democracy rightfully steps in to take a hand. Concert of action as an object of the organization is always allowable within the limits of the law, but it must not dictate terms to the larger body, under the plea that it can right its own wrongs if let alone. The spirit of that is unsocial—feudalistic. The class

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

sentiment—the class feeling—in itself considered, cannot be counted an infraction of the laws of human society. Human pursuits have a differential quite natural. Men of like pursuits are drawn together by like feelings and like ideas, and their guild associations are profitable to themselves. There is no help in economic society for that which produces the classes, and they must learn to live together on terms of fairness. Any demand of a class in which other classes are expected to take care of themselves is divisive in its inception. Any class has the right to weigh its claims against the claims of other classes—and to make the social appeal; but when it begins to assert power at the point of the claim, the class war begins. A show of reason is always better than a show of power. Power has a threat. Reason has an appeal. Power, as such, is obliged to crouch finally. Nothing on this earth, in the last resort, is held by power. The

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

temper of it is to awaken antagonism, and the antagonism will translate itself into action finally. The assertion of power is an insult to the sense of human fairness. The time is here for the enactment of a stringent law to hinder the possibility of any number of men to manipulate grain or any necessary product to the detriment of the masses. There must not be the investment of a power anywhere which compels the butter of a poor child's bread to be spread any thinner.

Whenever a class refuses to recognize the community obligations alongside of its special interests, it will find human society resentful directly. If it is not willing to make fair concessions where economic interests for the time clash, then it is not willing to consider the needs of other men, and it has come to the end of reason. Justice in human society must remain diffusive. It must reach the last poor man on the outer rim of the social bestowals, the last

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

little girl on her way to school. The little girl must have an opportunity for her life equal to any. She must have right of way for the best she can do for herself against the corporate millions, and against the federated thousands of men who undertake to force general society to make a contribution to their interests unfairly. The government must have no coordinates with itself. Combines of money or combines of persons should not weigh a farthing in the general administration of affairs. An extra cent paid on the school girl's stockings because of any combine is an unjust tribute. She is punished because she is not able to bring counter pressure to bear in her own interest. At this point in society the individual may be always at the mercy of the classes. Society, and not the classes, is engaged in the business of administering equal justice. If it has to act coordinately with the classes it becomes impotent. Then as a symbol of justice it is a travesty.

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

To get on in the world, then, will be a favor to the individual and not a right. What kind of civil rule is that?

The common interests of men have now become of tremendous magnitude. More things are being held in common than ever before. The common interest has come to mean the individual right. Individuals may not become enemies therefore. Separate neighborhoods may not fence themselves off into belligerent camps. Both the barbarisms of personal strife and the selfish feudalisms of class and clan must take oath to obey an empire of law, to the end that the equities of life may be conferred on the man of low degree. Group-mindedness in citizenship is only private-mindedness raised to the n^{th} power. There must be no divided allegiances, no exclusive pro-class fealty, no independencies of law for anybody if society is to endure.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

I refer here to the classes as they are related to the government under which they exist and whose institutions make it possible for them to express themselves in such differentials of value. Those engaged in the same pursuit may rightfully organize. They get acquainted. They improve themselves as workmen. They come to a common understanding. They cultivate among themselves the fraternal spirit. They may have for each other an added attachment for the same reason that a man ought to love his wife above his regard for other women. They may act in concert in collective contracts. They may, as a body, stand for just working conditions, and for wages which mean a fair share of the profits of production. They may bring those who manage capital to a recognition of the rights of human beings in all the cases where they have become dead to them. There is certainly a justifiable group interest. Industry has this kind of natural par-

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

ticularization in it. Modern tendencies are toward having about as many classes as there are pursuits.

These pages stand only against the overaccent, against an overlordship which defeats the generalizations of law. The majority is not obsessed with a class consciousness. Children are not. Housewives and mothers are not. Many people of all work are not. Farmers are not. These all have the marks of their work on them. In a limited sense they live the insular life—they go straight, and obey the law. And they are the equals of any. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is a constitutional guarantee, against which no special interest may have the unsocial power of discrimination. That law of liberty is of equal value to those who compose the classes, and gets not in their way except at the point where they are inclined to put the power of a thousand against one, and to settle an issue without any ap-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

peal to the law of righteousness involved.

When Louis XVI came to the throne of France he found what his grandfather had left him—an abandon of life which had for its shibboleth, “After us the deluge.” He made the experiment of calling into the counsels of the government, as a last resort, representatives of the classes. He evidently had the evil intent to pit them one against another. When three dogs want a bone and two of them get into a clash, the other dog gets it. The Commons went into the saddle against the Clergy and the Nobles. A revolt against the old order was soon on. The Bastile was stormed and taken, and stable government was at an end.

The English government, previous to the outbreak of the present war, was in the grip of certain radical and dangerous disintegrations. The threat of rupture was in the air. A minority who had the advantage of a close organiza-

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

tion began to grow lax in community patriotism, and for the common law, and for the national sovereignty. That steady adherence of the English people to an ordered government by law—the richest fruit of their civilization—was threatened with a breakdown any day. An incurable separateness pervaded the class contentions. And if an outside danger had not cemented the warring masses, God only knows what might have happened. But the quiet during the war is understood to be only a truce, which is an evil omen. It may be that the measureless chastening all the people now know will make them ashamed to nurse such a strife of factions. It may be that the men back from the trenches, where all kinds of blood get mixed and run down the streams into the sea, will yet have a care for the nation's life, and will be able to coerce the lesser factions, who have shown a temper to throw the most precious principles away with a flout.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

It is a little difficult in a provincial strife for a people to see that a birth-right is worth more than a mess of pot-tage. The spirit which prompts men to seize what they can for their class inconsiderately is born partly of ignorance. They would not do so if they had the larger vision, if they understood just how industrial society goes together, and what the elements of its prosperity are. It is not because they have the evil intent, but because they fail to see the dependence of any class pursuit on all other class pursuits. They do not see the larger coordinations of this busy world clearly enough to care for them, and so it comes about that they are not good friends to themselves.

The ordered life of a nation begins to disintegrate when its center of authority begins to break down. That authority breaks when class interests are brought up into its executive centers. When any class may have a con-

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

troversy with the government, the rights of those who do not belong to that class are in jeopardy. The stability of democratic institutions rests on the principle of fair play all around. Class interests are admissible, if they are willing to grant the rights for which they contend. In all industrial dispute the doctrine of the universal right must emerge. In all emergencies the welfare of the general public must be first. Private constitutional rights must be preserved; private interests and wishes must not be made first over the public interest. Those who set themselves against the order of human society become bad citizens. A notorious criminal who was trying to make class loyalty condone for the blackest crimes said he was willing to take his punishment for the sake of the cause. He was blinded by his own low instincts. No good cause on earth connects itself with his act. The group understanding which supports

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

such a man is either obtuse or criminal. The masses of men have toward it only detestation.

I have the feeling that the temper which I here interpret is more than a fly in the ointment. The only cure for it I see is a stronger faith in the necessities of an ordered coherence of government by law to hold all diverse interests together under the common rule until an injustice can be righted in an orderly way. It is bad blood and bad policy also to break with that which is of political method, for the reason that an industrial injustice cannot be remedied instantly.

Among the masses a sense of the unity and significance of the civil state is weakening. A sense of the worth of experience in the making of law and of the importance of its execution is weakening also. The wholeness of the country's affairs tends to get out of the view of the common man. Not much wonder, for the wholeness of things

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

now is not to be understood by anybody. But it is possible for an intelligent man to get his bearings as an elector. He has a chance to know about his neighbor's interests as well as his own. To live and let live, the first lesson of justice, he is able to learn. He ought to have sense enough to quit praying for himself and his wife and his son John. He ought to be able to see that if he owned the whole country, he would not be able to manage it nearly so well as it is being managed now in his own interest. He gets that now for which he does not toil, neither does he spin. In a country like this he is born rich, and he ought not to kick up such a muss, when, in the game of grab-and-get he misses his grab. When it is in any man's mind to think the whole game of life consists in making things come his way, he is utterly lost to his associative obligations. He is then ready for war if the law of the crowd obliterates his choices. He is averse to fitting himself

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

into the massed interests of the people about him. He is a biological unity in spite of himself—a little builder worm leaving a small deposit for the ages to inherit—but he thinks of that as so much loss. He is a fastened-down man. Some great establishment may have fitted him into a treadmill, with no stipulation for a day off. He may have used a monkey wrench for ten years without a single Sunday with his family. His brain is then functioned to the use of a single tool. He is an animated monkey wrench. Is it his fault or his virtue? The kind of world we live in, the degree of progress to which we have attained, have in them this under-pull for the countless thousands. And the only remedy is a radical reconstruction of life's viewpoint. Unless the humanities intervene there is positively no hope.

The ideals of the street and the market place are destructive to those who work there. It is because business is war

COMMUNITY AND CLASSES

that it needs to be infused with a new temper from the bottom. The issue is very distinctly moral. Nothing else matters as a remedy. Justice enthrones itself in the realm of spirit. Methods are secondary. They adjust themselves to a situation when there is anything doing. The larger intelligence, the common righteousness, the spirit of fraternity—if we turn to these to stay with them, they will soon have a new world to their credit. Intelligence, righteousness, fraternity—the matter of what these are in their applications to life, comes up for discussion, and makes up the endless issue in thought, but when we are held by them in principle we come from the circumference to the heart and center of the human sphere. Intelligence will always be limited and partial, morality will always be more or less imperfect, the fraternity will be humanistic and not absolute, but life's viewpoint, under the pull of them will be shifted from its present channeled

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

fatalistic running into the broader currents where culture and ethics and religion have converged to place securely in control the unitary values of human history.

V

THE ECONOMIC SIDE OF SOCIALISM

ABOUT the greatest and fairest thing which may be said of the incongruities of modern Socialism, is that they make up a protest against the tragedy of living. It has the good intention in larger degree than the practical sagacity. It has been proved safe for the democracy to take up into its structure the right of opportunity for social experiments to give to themselves self-expression under existing law. All peaceable social theories among a free people have a right to themselves, so long as they do not run at cross currents to the accepted ethic of civil living. The quickest ending of an unsound radicalism is its trial. If there is a short cut to the millennium, let those who think they

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

know the way go through and return and report, if they are willing to pay their own expenses. Those who think they are in possession of the superior social ideals have room enough under existing laws to make them valid in application. There is always some little corner where a new thing may be tried out without disturbing anybody; and if it comes to have set characteristics, and does not break back, and the human life flourishes under it, the future for it, among a free people, ought to be an open highway. A horse may not be worth what the owner asks for him, and yet he may have some good points, and the owner may be safely allowed to keep him and wear him out. I say this much to those who go about with a worked-out social theory which they have never tried, and who promise a paradise at the end of it.

It is untenable to condemn in toto any great and persistent propaganda. Socialism in the world, until now, has

SOCIALISM

been a spirit in the air more than anything else. Under many theories, opinions, doctrines, philosophies, the world has a kind of hodgepodge—which means that it lacks in the unitary understandings of itself. The temper of it is more consistent than its thinking. Its dreams are for the happiness of all, which by so much puts it in sympathy with all the good of all the ages. It stands for the uplift of the downmost man, and draws him to itself like a magnet. It arrays itself against the inequalities of life without taking great account of the unequal qualities of life. It has stood much for the absurd failure and monotony of a common larder. It has pointed out the defects of the established order which nearly everybody sees. And its advances in recent years have been very great. And its general ideas have come to such open significance as to demand for themselves some discriminate and analytic understanding.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

We discuss only in brief here its economic features, and for the reason that the cult of it stands on the breadline as a first point of advantage. That fact relates it to human toil and its consequences.

In the earlier half of the last century quite a number of communistic experiments were put in operation in the United States. The record which they made, and the literature they left, is now of distinct intellectual interest to all students of social affairs. Brook Farm, New Harmony, The Rappite Fathers, The Fourier, and Brisbane societies, and others, all to the number of forty or more, made at the time a distinct impression on American social thought, and so they could not have helped leaving certain currents of influence on the life of the nation. Certainly, on the whole, they were valuable experiences in social living. They were peaceable—high-visioned, creative, idealistic. They sought the less distressful

SOCIALISM

—the better life. They proposed to ingraft an order of living to take the place of that which they felt to be imperfect and unsound. The American people were good-humored toward these testers of a new way. The members of these bodies showed among themselves, and toward others, no special enmity. They were not self-assertive in an unpleasant way. They had no vindictiveness, no revolutionary intent. They were well set as to location, and they had a fair chance. They did not succeed, because human nature among them did not measure up to their ideals. Theirs was a mild-mannered philosophy which undertook to get rid of self-seeking and laziness and dishonesty by destroying the motives to these sins. If all are supplied in equal measure, if want is unknown, if there are no rich and no poor, and no one in want, no sickness unattended, and all normal desires gratified, everybody ought to be good and happy. The sweet reasonableness

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

of it attracted many fine minds. Hawthorne, and Horace Greeley, and scores of others like them were infatuated for a time. They preached a broadly humane social gospel. These organizations were amazingly prosperous for a time. Their reports from themselves read like good news sent home from a fisherman's camp. Each self-nucleated center became a rugged school of the impractical. Human nature would not come to the scratch. Those who admitted all comers began to disintegrate almost immediately. Those who selected their material created a company of kindred souls, and continued for years; but they finally saw that a selective human society was on its face a social defeat. It contradicted the principle of universality. The lazy ones would impose on the industrious. The dishonest and the immoral entered among them and gave them trouble. They had to make the civil society from which they had withdrawn a kind of

SOCIALISM

gehenna gate into which they pitched their human refuse. The old order had to take and handle what they could not use. The folk who made up these bodies were the good people who, by indirection, cleared the air of some social mists. They were little fairy social fabrics which served the purpose of showing how not to do it. They did not master the stern fact which faces any community life, which is that of making provision for the control of the scoundrel who proposes to take the center of the stage. No social scheme will ever stand which is builded on the faith that the moral integrities are absolute in their action. It is true that all men ought to be honest, and it is just as true that they are not. A human society without provision for dealing with the socially unfit is chimerical. It will have its terror if it does not do something with its wreckage. The fallacy of these earlier experiments was their attempt to build an outer struc-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

ture fitted to take care of all comers. It was the preconceived superior way. It was a series of specializations on the superstructure. It was a scaffolding with triggers underneath.

So always the social arrangement which essays to take the rough edges from the motives to exertion fails. It is an indolent theory which proposes to have everything standardized in order to give relief from life's brunt. Equal economic conditions for the strong and the weak, the upright and the vicious, blot out inherent moral distinctions. Diverse capacities cannot be made to suffer stratification. To provide the living conditions which the most energetic enjoy for those of vacuous and indifferent life is to send the whole social body downgrade. Houses, victuals, clothes, workdays all regulated will produce a paradise of drones. Show me my life ahead provided for without care, and my energies are clipped that moment. There is no equitable way to

SOCIALISM

take the whole product of labor and pass it out as we do at a picnic dinner. Those who purpose to eat and not to work provoke resentment in those who stand for the square deal. The obligation on the individual to be a producer of some kind is a social law which never rubs out. Whoever has nothing to exchange in the barter of values is in a bad way. The bedridden may have smiles to give to the nurses and keep even in that way, but whoever takes in any way and does not give in some way is a pauper. The world's toilers and the world's do-nothings cannot live in the same house and divide even at the same table. In fact, their relationships are to-day becoming strained even while living in the same world.

Socialism, as the world now understands its general features, has made great advance from these primitive communistic ideals. It has become a world-factor, with the home of its propaganda among the most favored

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

nations. That it presents about as many phases as there are minds to discuss it is not a condemnatory statement. The same may be said of Protestantism as an expression of the life of religion. The fact is indeed a hindrance to the strongest unified self-assertion, but at the same time it is a natural consequence of a discussion where the human mind is a free force. Its general idea seems to be about like this: The government ought to perform a lot of functions for the individual which he has heretofore performed for himself, and which, in the stress of changes in industrial circumstances, he is no longer able to do.

It would be difficult to fairly locate responsibility for the existence, in the modern business world, of a number of tendencies which have placed too much of the world's wealth into too few hands, and while certain plain advantages are to be derived from massed capital in the hands of individuals and

SOCIALISM

corporations, it has brought with it an extreme distress of personal limitations. Workmen become fastened to their places. They become subject to the will of the employer. The shadows always collect about a fastened-down man. Socialism works in these shadows—it floods this twilight with iridescent dreams of life's universal well-being. It starts with a grievance which everybody knows to exist and about which every lover of his kind is perplexed. Is there a way out of the tangled issue, which does not deify the impractical? Is there a movement in that direction?

In both the business world and in the civil administration may be detected a growing conscience toward a fairer distribution of the products of labor and capital. There will not be a redistribution except as the military exigencies of the war contribute to that end. To take from the haves and turn over to the have-nots is the short cut to measureless infamies. Property values, as they are

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

now held, have reached their standards under the laws which the democracy has made for itself, and a shuffle and redistribution could only appear through the power vested somewhere in a revolution. The real problem is to right that which has been working out of balance to produce a degree of power where it ought not to exist. Labor, at times, while it has received what it agreed to take, has not received the values of an equivalent, and the conditions of work, often, have been regardless of the human life itself. The industrial development has been one-sided. Evidences of an unsocial accumulation are before any man's eyes. It is the plain duty of citizenship to secure for itself protection in the situations and cases where the danger lies.

Still, the distribution of wealth in America is the most satisfactory the world has ever known. We have many millions of well-to-do and contented property holders. In the matter of property distribution we are not going

SOCIALISM

to the bowwows. Public thought has for years seriously addressed itself to a serious question, and the turning tides are already apparent. The distributing factors are seen at work in several directions. And they are not in the line of dangerously drastic social action. Nearly all of them have a place in the natural evolution of business enterprise and method. Open discussion thrown into the daily actions of men modifies their movements in the direction of what is fair and right. Let any man's grievance be made an open book, let any injustice offer its challenge before the court of all appeals, and while the adjustment may not be made immediately, for the reason that the voices of justice from a crowd come out a little slowly, there need be no doubt about the result, and it may be reached without storm or wasteful temper. There is no room for the rufous hot-head, no place for class recrimination and strife, no place for the boycott which is un-American and

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

cowardly, no place for organized repression.

Capitalist centers now begin to recognize the importance of a distributed ownership of their values. Many are giving their employees stock on favorable terms. The Pennsylvania Railroad System now boasts that its bondholders number some twenty thousand. Other large concerns are voluntarily turning back to their employees a percent of the profits, and that above the daily wage. Others are distributing the profits in an extreme wage which actually capitalizes each employee. Others carry insurance for employees above the wage. Large numbers provide pensions for old age, as well as sick benefits. In 1916 the free offerings of the American people in public gifts summed up more than a billion dollars. We are in the afternoon of the day of predatory wealth.

The sixteenth amendment to the United States Constitution puts a

SOCIALISM

graduated tax on incomes—and the method of it is to increase the percentage as the income is greater. It is a national movement in the direction of distribution. The Supreme Court lately has confirmed the validity of the workmen's compensation acts of the various States—even that of Washington, in which compensation in part is taken out of the public treasury, after the manner of the insurance act of England.

But the most significant movement in the direction of the socialization of property values may be found in the universally accepted principle of the taxation of property for public uses. The intent is to provide advantage which may be appropriated by the rich and poor alike, and which is of no less value to the rich because the poor get from it values equal to any. It means an increase in the amenities of associative living and enjoyment of the same thing by each citizen at a rate which the poor can afford.

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

Highways, bridges, pavements, sewerage, sanitation, parks, drinking fountains, water systems, city lighting, museums, libraries, hospitals, school-books, schools, churches, technical institutes, the postal service, postal savings banks, federal banking, parcel post, vocational training, county provision for the poor, boards of health, education endowments, state benevolent institutions, institutions of special research—these are all actually socialistic in the true sense. It is value taken from those who have it and applied to the public benefit. It is the universalization of value. It is sound policy. It is sound business. It is sound politics. It is sound philanthropy. It is sound democracy. *It is the only sound socialism.*

And the end is not yet. The movement toward more things in common is in its beginning stages. The outlook is toward the telephone and telegraph service, railroads, street cars, inter-

SOCIALISM

urban lines, water and lighting facilities. Vast government ownership means vast government regulation, and that may have in it danger for the democracy. But it has become questionable in political ethics if any public utility ought to furnish to any individual any degree of profit. The monopoly of a public utility is in its nature unsocial. Public ownership ought to mean the whole service at cost to the public. It is a step in the direction of the distribution of values. Its success would depend on the honesty of the political administration. That particular risk makes it of doubtful expediency. It may be safely said, however, that we are in a slow but sure movement in the direction of the extension of the power of government, to increase the number and extent of social advantages, to reach with the benefits of civilized society the downmost man in all out-of-the-way places. It has in it also the sound logic of advance by test and experiment. This

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

definite movement in socialism—old and tried—ought not to be deflected. If the individual under it is called on to make larger sacrifices of personal holding, it will bring about so many and great common advantages, that large private wealth will not be needed in order to enjoy the finest results of progress and culture.

Nobody claims perfection for the established ways of business and social betterment. Methods are always tentative and provisional, and are subject to improvement. It is of chiefest concern that the community life of the world is now alive to the interests of the common man. He must have a secure place and a satisfactory time for himself and those dependent on him. No association is worth anything which crushes the selfhood of the citizen. The nabobs are now about to break their necks trying to get into the ranks of the commoner. The genius in finance may get to be of so low standing that the breed

SOCIALISM

of him will become extinct. We are headed for a democracy of labor. And no man on earth knows what that is to be. If it is to be an experiment with and a reversal of the laws of the orderly human society, as men now understand these laws, it means revolution and anarchy. If it means the establishment of equal justice in human relations, a new world appears. With an educated and alert people impractical and visionary social schemes usually run a brief course. We may safely rely on the repression of revolutionary movements because our people have come to know what any swift intrusion into the social order means. Any preconceived scheme of government is always an absurdity. Society is a life; its base is biologic, and its healthful growth is by the inherency of law which resents any rude mechanical handling. It grows not at all except in the direction of the human destination.

The political doctrinaire flashes in

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

and flashes out, and leaves little but the smell of his own powder and matches. No untried thing is ever foisted instantly on an intelligent self-ruled people. They have no way of bringing any radical shift instantly about. When the good man of the house goes to consult his wife, that takes some time; and when they both go out to consult the neighborhood, other days elapse. The people who get impatient of the slow plodders, might as well go count their fingers until these neighbors get the hang of themselves. This is the way of the democracy, and it is a good way. We do not patronize a sound social principle when we give it time to gestate—it takes its own time usually. Any new spirit potency in government is an immortal factor, and it does not appear, like Jonah's gourd, a new thing in a night. In the setting of new policies to fit the new phases of a community life it is important that some hot blast of experience shall show where the slag is.

SOCIALISM

In the yet undiscovered clues to the larger liberty and the broader human life let no test of caution and safety be neglected. Fear not the sober majorities, but draw back from the Jehu who drives furiously.

Abraham Lincoln was the most unerring statesman of the nation's life, and one reason for it was that he could not be hurried to his conclusions. He gave his own convictions time to brew, and he never went forward until he had thought himself through. So the caution of conservatism is needed in every new movement among Western peoples toward the transfer of power from the property-owning class to the wage-earning class. On the face of the movement there can be no valid reason against it if the intent is justice rather than the ascendancy of a class.

Without question, the factor of property has had too much to do in shaping political and economic policies. But nothing would be gained in a transfer

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

from one ruthless self-seeking spirit to another. Being in the majority, the responsibilities of rulership may yet come to the wage-earner. And if he should interpret his new power as the triumph of his kind rather than as an investment for the common welfare, his blunder will be as great as that which he has overthrown. The rulership which aims to exploit appears to be on its last pegs, and the rulership which aims to get even is only one degree better. What a blind provincialism it is where the social solidarity does not appear! The principle of solidarity in human society moves in the direction of realizing a democratic centralization of adequate power to hold in itself the first and commanding appeal for the welfare of all alike. It means the offering of life's chances to any child born. It means to make of itself a benefit without distinction of race or color or pursuit. Its business is to administer justice, and bestow advantage to life's ut-

SOCIALISM

most limits. Nobody left out—nobody forgotten. It is the throughgoing unity, open to all the roadside voices, so that the little people may have somewhat to say. It is a power and a beneficence with its center of control just above everybody's head. It is the administrative self-poise which has command of itself under all the inequalities of human condition, either of capacity or possession or of morals. It does not undertake to work miracles or reverse natural law, or to guarantee peace and plenty to those who do not make effort, but it means capacity for administration without assuming the role of a paternity.

VI

THE SOIL

SUPPOSE the people who dream dreams have seen them all come true. Wars have ceased under the ægis of some universal league of peace. Intemperance no longer blights the nations. The social evil is driven from its festering place in the human flesh. Provision is made against the extremes of poverty. The standards of business life are crowned with goodness and honor. The strife of class is supplanted by the accepted understandings which make men of different pursuits look each other in the face with confidence and good will. The scavengers of disease all have surrendered to the mastery of science. The causes of insanity are done away and our asylums vacated. Each new child is born into the world

THE SOIL

with the rights of health and a chance to get on. No human hand is ever set against another in life's peaceful pursuits. The laws of health are so mastered as to bring the average of life up to a hundred and fifty years.

How long after that will it be till the world is overpopulated? Is the race to be defeated in the greatness of its moral achievements? Will the populations of the earth ever crowd its capacity for subsistence? There is only so much land and so much sea. If the millions who are now put out of life so ruthlessly in war are permitted to live and come to the lengthened years, with those who are free from disease and other like casualties, what is to be done with the massed multitudes? Will there be standing room? This far-away anxiety is worth at least as much as the demonstration of the geologists that the earth is freezing up at the rate of one degree every thirty thousand years. It would be a new experience for human beings

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

to suffer the defeat of general prosperity.

One time there was a man Child born in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn; but that fact did not hinder him from finding a large place in human history. The curse of the earth has not been in its human numbers. The densest populations have always been advantaged where they have been morally and spiritually related, and have been obedient to sound discretion. This world can be vastly more populous than it is and with profit to all who live in it. The resources of the earth may be indefinitely multiplied. The present population could be made to live on life's wastages. Not one half of the soil of the earth is yet utilized. Its richest fertilities yet lie buried in tropical growths. In old Europe and in old England great acreages are yet kept as hunting preserves for titled snobs. In a needless way the earth is being cultivated destructively. The pre-

THE SOIL

historic peoples of the South American Andes knew better how to make each square foot produce than the modern boasted agriculturist. If the issue of the limit of human subsistence is made with the soil, the end of the world is not in sight. It is the negligible factor in economic calculation.

And yet the question of subsistence is sure to bring distress to this earth in the days ahead. Hunger Lane will probably never be deserted. The rush will continue away from the soil which is the mother of us all. Those who fly from the mother life will for a time find provender and a fire, but that movement will not be a permanence. The limit is ahead and not far out of sight. Population does not crowd subsistence—it crowds into the desert spaces of the cities. That which the city produces is not subsistence. The city is the place where the stuff of the soil is shuffled—and there are too many shufflers and not enough diggers in the dirt. The city is

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

the place where each one tries to pinch off a piece of whatever he handles. It is also the place where the fight for bread begins. The soil-tillers have no bickering about a place to work, for the work of ten lies in the reach of each one. The more people in the country the less the cost of living. The more people in the city the higher the cost of living. In the country everybody produces the market; in the city everybody crowds it. Industrial strife and competition begin with urban peoples. In the country one can produce food for many. All the large cities of the earth are now the breeders of retrogressive spots where the human life in them sinks below any savagery. Its congestion has become a remediless evil, and under present tendencies it is sure to grow. Sooner or later the folks in the cities will have to go out and rediscover the soil. They will have to kiss it and love it, and make peace with its conditions, and make it the place where the life cen-

THE SOIL

ters and its destiny is worked out. The soil lost its charm with Adam when he appropriated that which was forbidden rather than work. Soil-tilling is the earth's greatest blessing and the earth's greatest tragedy. Millet in his famous painting, "Man with the Hoe," has become an apostle of despair. He interprets the misunderstanding of labor. He pictures the soul's ghost with its falsehoods and betrayals. He pictures a working machine, dull, sullen and blundering, when the response of nature to the touch of his hoe ought to have sent him into laughter and shouting. The world fails in its transformations because the soil for so many loses its power to hold until it enriches.

From the time when human beings began to build urban centers the rural inhabitant has always been at an economic disadvantage. The city dweller who has never had the country experience, and the countryman who came to town so long ago as to have lost his per-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

sonal memory, both grow ecstatic over the life of the great independent. But country life has always been a good life from which to make a shift into something else. The alert and quick-witted of the breed to-day break for the cities. Clubs and coercions could not stop them. The softer life is in the city, as it looks to those who go: not so much sweat, not so much dirt, not so much sunburn, not so much frostbite, not so many long hours, not so much wearing of one suspender, not so much lonesomeness. Before they go they never take a trip through slum streets. They see paved walks and palaces, and men of prominence in fine clothes—and in every one a brag about being country born. Country virility is an asset in the tussle of city life. There is more or less variety in a place where people stand on one another's shoulders rather than on the ground—and not very much mystery about it. People go toward a glitter like a bug toward a candle; and

THE SOIL

reason for the glitter may not be found in the country. The shamble which the clods put into a man's gait is not good form. Your country man is a rough-looker. The manner of his life makes him so. He looks like the weather. His feet get cut with the flint of life's way, and he cannot escape the pain of it.

In the ancient world, uniformly, the soil-digger is the under man. His condition was one of desperate poverty. He was always the first to be exploited because he was first to touch life's necessities. The condition of the modern tiller of the Nile Valley is not improved over the man who did similar work four thousand years ago. The endless generations have kept nothing to show of the unfailing gifts of a garden land. What might be an advance is appropriated by those who neither dig nor sow. Two blue cotton shirts and seed enough for next year are supposed to be his dower from the Almighty. The dam at Fashoda is an English monopoly and

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

only increases his tribute. There is no outlook for him. He has inherited the spirit of those who toiled for a generation, without remuneration, to build a tomb for one of their kind.

The average soil-tiller of China is a stranger to any variety or sufficiency of food. He is the patient one under a burden never lifted. To miss a lick is to get behind with some necessity. His wife lies down in a houseboat, struggles with God for a new life in her child, and in three hours she is up and about her work.

The soil-tillers all over India are pitifully poor. They are cringing and subservient. The Russian peasant until recent years was little more than an industrious and patient serf. He now dreams of liberty and an outlook, neither of which is to come to him until he is another kind of man with another vision. Ambassador Gerard says the German peasant is the worst-fooled man in all the world. He knows

THE SOIL

nothing of large wealth accumulation. Only by heroic toil and economy does he get on at all. English agriculture as a pursuit in competition with others broke down years ago. The hard work of it and the undesirable life of it has cut down production.

The French peasants, men and women, are work oxen. They make the soil break out in laughter—they get so tired they cannot laugh. The hacienda man of Mexico is practically a slave. The highest type countryman of the ages is the American farmer. Population started here with a wild country. City life had practically nothing to do with initiating the American manner of living which has put the stamp of itself over the whole of our territory. Many countrymen have been and are prosperous to-day. The circumstances have been for them favorable beyond precedent. Climate and soil and resources of all kinds have been at hand, and a varied and vigorous stock of men and

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

women have made these the mandibles of their power to spring, Midaslike, into a nation's prosperity. He is at this moment the one sturdy type of man who stands between vast populations and their hunger unto death.

What nervous interest we now take in this man between the rows of corn! He hears a bedlam of voices saying, "For God's sake make two blades of grass grow where one grew before!" Food shortage means what it says. Farmers are not producing enough to feed themselves and those who work in other ways. Is it his fault? Has he become lazy? Has he become a peter-dick in his business, unable to make the ground produce? Has his wife quit work? Is it of malice in him to starve the folks who dislike the soiled hand? Is he indifferent about having an abundance for the market? Is it lack of brains in him to see the point and take the advantage of wind and weather? Statesmen are giving him advice. Bankers

THE SOIL

are taking great interest in him. State legislatures are paying the expenses of farmers' institutes to get more things in his head. County superintendents are being put over him. Folks in kid gloves are telling him how to do it.

Is it so that he is a dull intellect on which the experience of years posits no value? Are these country people actually in need of kindergarten instruction on the value of clover, and manure, and changes of crops, and balanced rations, and tilling, and breeds of stock, and home economies, and the thousand other things over which they have been worn to a frazzle for generations? The great good-humored food commissioner of the United States is now actually telling these countrywomen that they can make clabber cheese out of sour milk. He is urging them especially to economize in family expense when there are millions of them feeding their families a whole year on less money than he pays for a fortnight's house rent. That kind of pa-

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

ternalism is harmless, but it lacks dignity. When food prices are to be held within limits, the farmer is the first man nailed down. Those between him and the consumer are not nailed down because they have the commercial understandings. At the close of the War of the Rebellion wheat sold at two dollars and forty cents, and the loaf then was twice as large at five cents as the ten-cent loaf is now, because then the miller and the baker and the grocer were sublime independents, as the farmer is now. Farmers have not yet learned to protect themselves from a manipulated market. It is destiny for any class which makes no prices and sets no terms to be thrown under finally. The farmer is yet averse to any organized economic defense of himself. His numbers are too great to build for himself, without difficulty, an industrial guild. But suppose he should unionize himself? He is not an underling yet. He is a man of mettle and strength. He is intelligent—knows the

THE SOIL

law of mutual fair dealing and of justice. Suppose a wave of solidarity should sweep through his ranks and he should by concert of understanding refuse to bring his stuff to town? He is the best prepared man on earth for a general strike. He would not ask for much but to be let alone. He could supply himself with food. He could dig a hole in the ground and get his coal. He could skin a sheep and crawl into the hide. Ought he to do it? No. Ought he to be allowed? No. He would exercise, then, clearly an unsocial power. It would have in it the revolutionary threat. It would be against public policy. He would make little children cry for bread. It would be the last act where the tragedy of labor had turned into fury. It would be a power exercised without any national adjudication of its righteousness. It would be a power which takes itself for granted, as Germany does to-day. No class has the right to that sort of projection of power

THE TRAGEDY OF LABOR

into the industrial life of the nation. It might reach its aim, but it would destroy the social order.

I wish for the American farmer that he may remain the great good-humored individualist. The fact of it puts him at a disadvantage commercially. He knows that as well as anybody. He knows that he deals single-handed with a complex of manipulated prices. He knows that, coming and going, he is the cornered man; but he has the one advantage of having a business which lies next to the great mother of us all. For life's flat necessities he yet has an equal chance. His clothing is not quite so good, and it is not quite so fine a fit. His house does not average with the city dweller, and public utilities are not so fully in reach of him; but he lives close by the fountains of sustenance, and he is a feeder of all the people, and he will continue to do this and prosper if he is permitted to share in life equities. **He is not a sleepy head. He is aware**

THE SOIL

of himself and his age. He has not the temper for being used for general purposes. He could be goaded to self-defense and drive down the road in a juggernaut car. God spare my country from that culmination of the class conflict!

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

20m-7,'67 (H3149s4)

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000821644 2

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
THIS BOOK CARD



University Research Library

H1 e ST

CALI - NUMBER [] VOL

